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SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EUR/WE-MENNUTI, EB, AND AF/S

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [VT](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [VT](#) [ZA](#) [ZAEAGR](#)

SUBJECT: HOLY SEE FOREIGN MINISTER TAURAN PLEDGES TO CLARIFY HOLY SEE'S POSITION ON BIOTECH FOODS IN ZAMBIA AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

REF: A. A) 02 VATICAN 6141 B) 02 VATICAN 5625

[1](#)B. C) 02 VATICAN 4909

[1](#)C. D) 02 VATICAN 4361

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SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. HOLY SEE FOREIGN MINISTER ARCHBISHOP JEAN-LOUIS TAURAN CALLED IN AMBASSADOR JANUARY 21 TO SHARE THE RESULTS OF THE VATICAN NUNCIO IN ZAMBIA'S ASSESSMENT OF THE FAMINE AND THE DEBATE IN ZAMBIA OVER BIOTECH RELIEF FOOD. TAURAN HAD PREVIOUSLY PROMISED THE AMBASSADOR "GOOD NEWS" ON THE SUBJECT. TO THIS END, HE HIGHLIGHTED THE HOLY SEE'S EARLY CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMELIORATE THE FAMINE THROUGH THE ACTIVITIES OF CARITAS AND LOCAL CHURCHES. TAURAN ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE ANTI-BIOTECH VIEWS OF THE JESUIT ACTIVIST FATHER HENRIOT HAD BECOME WIDELY REGARDED AS THE VIEW OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ZAMBIA, AND PROMISED THE AMBASSADOR THAT THE HOLY SEE WOULD ENSURE THAT ITS GENERALLY PRO-BIOTECH VIEWS WERE PROVIDED TO THE ZAMBIAN CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS. THE HOLY SEE'S VIEW, AS OUTLINED IN A LETTER TO SECRETARY POWELL LAST YEAR (REF C) IS THAT BIOTECH FOODS SHOULD BE AVAILABLE TO POPULATIONS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, SUBJECT TO APPROPRIATE CAUTION COMPARABLE TO THOSE FOR PHARMACEUTICAL GOODS. THE HOLY SEE WILL ALSO ENCOURAGE THE BISHOPS AND, IF THEY ARE RELUCTANT, THE NUNCIO, TO SPEAK OUT MORE DIRECTLY ON THE SUBJECT. A RECENT EMBASSY-ORGANIZED CONFERENCE WITH A GROUP OF AFRICAN FARMERS AND BIOTECH EXPERTS -- INCLUDING ZAMBIA -- (SEPTEL) HELPED MAKE THE CASE TO KEY HOLY SEE OFFICES OF THE SAFETY AND POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF BIOTECH FOODS FOR AFRICA. END SUMMARY.

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THE "GOOD NEWS" COULD BE BETTER  
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[1](#)2. ARCHBISHOP TAURAN MET WITH AMBASSADOR AND DCM JANUARY 21 TO FOLLOW UP ON HIS PLEDGE TO LOOK INTO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S ROLE IN RESPONDING TO THE FAMINE IN ZAMBIA AND OTHER AFFECTED AREAS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. AT THE OUTSET, TAURAN SOUGHT TO MAKE CLEAR THAT THE HOLY SEE AND ITS AFFILIATED AGENCIES HAD BEEN ON THE FRONT LINES OF INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO RESPOND. FROM FEBRUARY 2002, HE NOTED, THE POPE HAD DONATED \$30,000 FROM HIS (MODEST) PAPAL FUND FOR GLOBAL RELIEF EFFORTS, AND, MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, CARITAS HAD MOBILIZED ITS RESOURCES EARLY AND HAD BEEN PLAYED AN IMPORTANT HUMANITARIAN ROLE THROUGHOUT THE FAMINE PERIOD. HE ALSO NOTED THAT THE LOCAL CHURCHES HAD BEEN ACTIVE ON THE GROUND IN PROVIDING ASSISTANCE.

[1](#)3. ACCORDING TO THE NUNCIO, THE HOLY SEE WAS INFORMED THAT THE ZAMBIAN MAIZE CROP SHORTFALL HAD "NOT YET HAD SERIOUS EFFECTS, THANKS TO THE AVAILABILITY OF OTHER FOODS IN THE COUNTRY." THE NUNCIO FURTHER MAINTAINED THAT GM FOODS WERE NOT INDISPENSABLE TO MEET THE PROBLEM, AS THERE WERE ONLY 15,000 TONS OF GM MAIZE IN DEPOSIT AT THE CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES HEADQUARTERS IN ZAMBIA, WHILE THE GOVERNMENT HAS 100,000 TONS OF NON-GM MAIZE IN RESERVE AND IS FINDING OTHER SOURCES. THE NUNCIO OPINED THAT THE SITUATION "WILL PROBABLY NOT GET WORSE IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS."

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A PLEDGE TO CLARIFY THE HOLY SEE'S POSITION  
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[1](#)4. TAURAN ACKNOWLEDGED THAT JESUIT ACTIVIST FATHER HENRIOT HAD UNFORTUNATELY SHAPED THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE CHURCH'S VIEW IN ZAMBIA. THIS RESULTED, HE SAID, FROM A

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COMBINATION OF HENRIOT'S PERSONAL ACTIVISM AND THE SILENCE OF THE ZAMBIAN CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS, WHO HAVE MADE NO OFFICIAL STATEMENT OF THE ADVISABILITY OF ACCEPTING BIOTECH FOODS. CONSEQUENTLY, THE NUNCIO REPORTED THAT "THE POSITION OF THE

JESUIT CENTER IS CONSIDERED TO BE THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH." THE JESUIT'S POSITION, WHICH HAS UNFORTUNATELY HELPED FRAME THE DEBATE OVER BIOTECH FOODS IN ZAMBIA AND WHICH MUST NOW BE OVERCOME WITH NEW INFORMATION, WAS SUMMARIZED BY THE NUNCIO IN HIS REPORT AS FOLLOWS:

- THE SAFETY OF THESE FOODS IS STILL UNDER STUDY;
- THE CONSUMPTION OF GM FOODS IN THE U.S. IS INTEGRATED IN THE CONSUMPTION OF ALL FOODS, WHEREAS IN ZAMBIA IT WOULD BE THE ONLY TYPE OF FOOD CONSUMED, WHICH "WOULD WEIGH UPON THE DETERMINATION OF ITS SAFETY);
- ZAMBIA IS RESOLVING THE PROBLEM BY IMPORTING NON-GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS AND IS EDUCATING ITS PEOPLE TO DIVERSIFY ITS EATING HABITS;

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ACTION EUR-00

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| INFO | LOG-00  | NP-00   | AF-00   | AGRE-00 | AID-00  | AMAD-00 | CIAE-00 |
|      | USNW-00 | DODE-00 | SRPP-00 | DS-00   | EB-00   | UTED-00 | VC-00   |
|      | TEDE-00 | INR-00  | LAB-01  | VCE-00  | NSAE-00 | PER-00  | TEST-00 |
|      | DSCC-00 | PRM-00  | DRL-01  | SAS-00  | /002W   |         |         |

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P 030822Z FEB 03  
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN  
TO AMEMBASSY LUSAKA PRIORITY  
SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY  
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

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- THE GMO'S COMING FROM THE U.S. ARE NOT IDENTIFIED AS SUCH, SINCE THE POLICY OF THE U.S. DOES NOT REQUIRE IT. HOWEVER THE CONSUMER HAS THE RIGHT TO KNOW;

- THE REASON FOR THE U.S. PRESSURE IN THIS MATTER IS BECAUSE THERE IS A SURPLUS OF GMO.

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15. IN LIGHT OF THESE POSITIONS, TAURAN AGREED WITH THE AMBASSADOR ON THE NEED TO ENSURE THAT THE HOLY SEE'S MORE BALANCED POSITION WAS WIDELY DISSEMINATED IN THE COUNTRY AND REGIONS. HE PROMISED TO ENSURE THE RESULTS OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE'S POSITION -- WHICH SEES NO REASON FOR REJECTION OF BIOTECH FOODS AND THEY SHOULD BE PROVIDED TO DEVELOPING COUNTRY POPULATIONS AS LONG AS THE PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPAL IS OBSERVED (AS IT IS WITH PHARMACEUTICALS) -- ARE PROVIDED TO ALL THE BISHOPS. THE HOLY SEE WOULD THEN ENCOURAGE THE BISHOPS TO ISSUE A STATEMENT AND DISSEMINATE THE WORD IN THEIR CHURCHES. TAURAN ADDED THAT IF THE BISHOPS FAILED TO DO SO -- WHICH IS POSSIBLE GIVEN THAT THE HOLY SEE CANNOT ORDER BISHOPS TO TAKE SPECIFIC STANDS ON POLITICAL ISSUES -- HE WOULD HAVE THE NUNCIO TAKE STEPS TO GET THE HOLY SEE'S POSITION OUT.

16. THE AMBASSADOR THANKED TAURAN FOR HIS COMMITMENT TO ENSURE THE HOLY SEE'S POSITION WAS DISSEMINATED MORE WIDELY IN ZAMBIA AND THE REST OF SOUTHERN AFRICA, BUT STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF MOVING QUICKLY GIVEN THE STILL PRESENT THREAT OF FAMINE IN THE COUNTRY. WHILE THE AMBASSADOR RECOGNIZED THAT THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAM HAD TAKEN STEPS TO WORK AROUND THE ZAMBIAN GOVERNMENT'S REJECTION OF U.S. AID, THE AMBASSADOR STRESSED THE INCREASED COSTS AND TIME THIS HAD IMPOSED ON THE RELIEF EFFORT. HE ALSO NOTED THAT OUR INFORMATION WAS NOT AS SANGUINE AS THAT PRESENTED BY THE NUNCIO, ALTHOUGH FOOD NOW APPEARED TO BE IN THE PIPELINE. BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE SITUATION, HOWEVER, THE AMBASSADOR POINTED OUT THAT THE ZAMBIAN DECISION REPRESENTED A NEGATIVE PRECEDENT WITH POTENTIALLY SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR BROADER

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AFRICAN RELIEF IF MORE COUNTRIES BEGAN FOLLOWING ZAMBIA'S LEAD AND REJECTED U.S. FOOD. GIVEN THAT THE U.S. PROVIDES OVER 60 PERCENT OF ALL RELIEF FOOD TO THE REGION, THE AMBASSADOR NOTED, SUCH RESTRICTIONS WOULD MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR HE WFP TO MEET ITS DEMANDS). TAURAN AGREED THAT SUCH A

PRECEDENT WOULD BE UNFORTUNATE, AND CONTRARY TO EFFORTS TO  
FEED THOSE IN NEED.

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COMMENT  
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17. THE HOLY SEE'S RESPONSE ON THIS ISSUE, ABOUT WHICH THE  
EMBASSY HAS BEEN PRESSING SINCE EARLY FALL, HAS BEEN SLOW IN  
COMING. NEVERTHELESS, WE HAVE HEARD FROM SOURCES WITHIN THE  
HOLY SEE THAT OUR REPEATED INTERVENTIONS -- RECENTLY  
REINFORCED BY OUR CANADIAN AND ARGENTINEAN DIPLOMATIC  
COLLEAGUES -- HAS GOTTEN THE HOLY SEE'S ATTENTION AND LED TO  
MOVEMENT ON THE ISSUE. SIGNIFICANTLY, THE POPE MADE TWO  
REFERENCES TO FAMINE IN AFRICA IN HIS ANNUAL ADDRESS TO THE  
DIPLOMATIC CORPS, REINFORCING THE FOCUS THE ISSUE IS NOW  
RECEDING. THIS GROWING INTEREST WAS ALSO REFLECTED IN THE  
BROAD VATICAN PARTICIPATION AT AN EMBASSY-SPONSORED  
CONFERENCE JANUARY 27 ON BIOTECH IN AFRICA, WHICH WAS  
ATTENDED BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SECRETARIAT OF STATE, THE  
COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, COR UNUM (RESPONSIBLE FOR  
HUMANITARIAN WORK), THE JESUIT DIRECTORS FOR AFRICA AND THE  
U.S., THE CARITAS CATHOLIC RELIEF AGENCY, THE SANT EGIDIO  
COMMUNITY, AND MEMBERS OF THE HOLY SEE DIPLOMATIC CORPS.  
EMBASSY LUSAKA'S PRESSURE HAS ALSO BEEN HELPFUL IN RAISING  
THE HOLY SEE'S APPRECIATION OF THE ISSUE, AND WE WOULD URGE  
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THAT THIS BE CONTINUED IN LIGHT OF THE NUNCIO'S POSITIVE  
REPORT TO THE VATICAN ABOUT THE EMBASSY'S EFFORTS TO ELICIT A  
MORE ACTIVE AND BALANCED POSITION. EMBASSY VATICAN WILL  
CONTINUE TO ENGAGE THE HOLY SEE AND AFFILIATED AGENCIES IN  
ROME TO RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGE OF AFRICAN FAMINE AND TO  
ENSURE BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF THE SAFETY AND POTENTIAL  
BENEFITS OF BIOTECH FOODS.

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